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Montana Indian Business Alliance

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Newly formed Montana Indian Business Alliance hosts meeting in Billings

The newly formed Montana Indian Business Alliance (MIBA) is an outcome of the historic 2006 Montana Indian Business Conference that was held in Great Falls in February, 2006 and had approximately 250 attendees. MIBA's partners are comprised of organizations and entities that are interested in promoting Indian business development. They include tribal organizations, tribal governments, state government, non-profits, tribal colleges, Indian owned businesses, Governor Schweitzer's office, lending institutions, consulting firms, consumer credit advocacy agencies, community development agencies, the Federal Reserve Bank and federal agencies.

MIBA's sole purpose is to foster development of Indian owned businesses. A new word was coined recently by ONABEN: that word is *Indianpreneur*. An *Indianpreneur* is a concentrated version of Indian and entrepreneur. The path to economic success and stability is steeper in Indian Country. MIBA is a uniquely Montana-specific tool working to "level out" that steep grade and equip Indianpreneurs with resources, data, information and networks to accelerate opportunity and development.

"The MIBA work teams have really stepped forward to get our actions moving," remarks Dr. Johnel Barcus, executive director of the Browning Community Development Corporation, MIBA executive committee member and an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation. "My organization is excited to be a part of MIBA. Among other things, MIBA is ready to begin planning the next Montana Indian Business Conference, scheduled to be held in October 2007."

Major Robinson, senior economic development specialist for the Montana Governor's office of economic development, MIBA executive committee member and an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, is excited about the potential economic impact that MIBA could have. "Indian Nations of Montana and Indian business owners already contribute a great deal to Montana's overall economy," Robinson points out. "Through the efforts of MIBA, we are striving to provide resources and opportunities for all Indian people, on and off the reservation, to develop and enhance their own interdependent economies."

"We have a great agenda planned which includes a business plan presentation from native students pursuing Business degrees at MSU Billings and we are spotlighting a local Indian Business owner and will feature Kitch Walker, President and Co-Founder of Ripple Marketing as the luncheon speaker presentation entitled "The Passion of Entrepreneurship: Embracing Your Destiny". Our goal is to provide information and to help Indian business owners network with organizations that can help their business get off the ground or expand!" states Maria Valandra, Vice-President of Community Development for First Interstate BancSystem and current chair for MIBA and an enrolled member of the Cree Nation.

Check out our website at www.mibaonline.org. If you are interested in becoming a MIBA partner, please contact Maria Valandra at 406-255-5395 or e-mail mvalandra@fib.com.